

# PHILOSOPHY 151- INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS



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**Office Hours:** M-F by appointment

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**Class Time:** W 6:30 pm - 9:15 pm

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## Course Description:

Philosophy 151 is an introductory survey course designed to expose students to the teachings and traditions of a wide variety of faiths. These include, but are not limited to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hindu traditions, indigenous religious practices, and emerging faiths. In addition to foundational information about each tradition, we will be focusing on a number of themes: defining "religion", theory vs. practice, moral codes, gender roles, asceticism, science and religion, and contemporary issues related to religious expression. The eclectic and ecumenical approach we will be using, combining anthropological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives, should allow us to investigate all of these issues in some depth. Students will have the opportunity to explore their own cosmologies and cosmogonies in any way they feel to be appropriate. The goal of the course is not to discredit or judge any belief system, but rather to provide an understanding of each in context.

The two philosophical ideas below are also VERY important in terms of how you approach this course.

### World religion is a VERY broad area

This is an introductory course in world religions, so we will only be scratching the surface of some of the major, enduring traditions around the world as well as some that are perhaps less well known. To get a sense of the religious make-up of the world's population, take a look at the graph on page 497 of the *Living Religions* text. That will give you a sense of the variety of religious expressions that exist in modern times.

Entire courses and fields of study are devoted to just ONE aspect of ONE of those traditions (i.e. Buddhist ethics, Christology, Jewish feminism, etc...), which means we will be necessarily brief in covering many topics. That is unavoidable in an introductory course. However, if you find yourself interested in a particular tradition or slice of a tradition, you will have the opportunity to pursue that in greater depth with your research paper.

Because the scope of the course is VERY broad, I will be using ideas from a number of academic fields to help clarify the discussion on particular traditions and their unique features. Some weeks, our discussions might seem more sociological; other weeks, the themes might have a more historical or anthropological tone. Just be prepared for this kind of approach.

### Religious studies is NOT theology

One of the key distinctions I like to make at the start of the course is the difference between the fields of religious studies and theology. In a nutshell, a religious studies perspective attempts to look at all religious

systems as being internally cohesive and viable; they work for the participants in a given tradition regardless of how that tradition appears to outsiders. For example, if I was an adherent of an Asatru kindred group (a type of neo-pagan movement), I could argue that there is nothing inherently less valid about *my* religious perspective in comparison to a more established religion like Judaism. I could make the same claim about other common comparisons: Christianity vs. Islam; Buddhism vs. Scientology, etc... An individual outside any of those traditions could take the position that some of those belief systems seem to have more easily verified components, but that does not invalidate a particular belief or viewpoint. ***We will try to look at all traditions with an equal amount of skepticism and acceptance.***

The religious studies viewpoint is not about “proving” or “disproving” any particular perspective on divinity, morality, or human nature. It is more focused on the similarities or universals amongst traditions in terms of common metaphors, orientations, rituals, symbols, or other facets of religious experience.

Theology, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that divinity exists (i.e. God is real) and then focuses on the systematic analysis of the belief structure that springs up around that reality. For example, Christian theology concerns itself with discussions of the attributes of God, the true message of the Gospels, how to lead a redeeming Christian life, etc... Islamic theology would concern itself with the same general ideas but within the context of the Quran and the precedent of Islamic scholarship internal to that tradition. More on that in later weeks!

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of global religious practice
- Interpret and analyze primary source religious literature from the historical-critical perspective
- Demonstrate understanding of the relationships between specific texts produced by different religious traditions and the teachings that arise from them.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between religious studies and other fields of academic endeavor (i.e. sociology, anthropology, history, etc...)
- Collaborate with others on presenting specific religious studies topics from a phenomenological perspective
- Use various critical thinking strategies to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources (i.e. primary texts, secondary texts, multi-media presentations, experiential learning, etc...)

#### **Required Text/Stuff:**

Living Religions, most recent edition, by Mary Pat Fisher

An Anthology of Living Religions, most recent edition, by Mary Pat Fisher and Lee W. Bailey

A working e-mail address.

Ability to access a computer/the Internet semi-regularly during the course of the term

#### **Attendance:**

I will be checking attendance for the first couple of meetings, but after that, it is up to you to attend regularly. Because most of the main themes about various traditions will be discussed in class, it is to your advantage to attend regularly. We will also be doing in-class writings just about every meeting; I will use those to determine the majority of participation points. One missed class will probably not result in any kind of huge deficit, but excessive absences (two or more) will most likely impact your work negatively. *If you miss more than three classes without a compelling reason, you will not receive a passing grade in the class.* If you miss a session, please see me on returning if you want copies of lecture slides, handouts, etc.

#### **Grading:**

The grading for this course is flexible and will be decided during the first day of class. The categories below indicate all the aspects that you will be graded on. The weight that is assigned to each one is up to the class as a whole. There are only five limitations: 1) the point total for response papers is not changeable, 2) no category can be worth less than 100 points, 3) fractional totals or those not rounded to the nearest ten points are not acceptable, 4) the group wiki project

can't be worth more than 200 points, and 5) the total number of points must equal 1000. Please remember that if one category is given fewer points, then another category must be weighted more heavily.

Research project (exploring a tradition not your own) -----	___	points
Mid-term and final exams -----	___	points
Response papers (5) -----	250	points
In-class writings and discussion -----	___	points
Group wiki page project -----	___	points

Letter grades are then generated at the end of the term based on a strict percentage scale. Grades with an attached "+" or "-" will be given for those point totals which fall within the top or bottom 2% of each grade category (there is no "A+"). For example, a student with 860 points would receive a straight "B" grade. A different student, who had accumulated only 820 points, would receive a "B-" (820= the lowest 2% of the "B" category or  $.02 \times 1000 = 820$ ).

A=	900-1000 points
B=	800-899 points
C=	700-799 points
D=	600-699 points
F=	below 600 points

#### Due Dates:

Due dates are included in the syllabus and are not generally flexible. Late papers will *not* be accepted unless a student is experiencing/has experienced a personal tragedy, emergency, or some other *extreme* situation. In such cases, try to speak to me privately as soon as possible. **All students have one "grace period" to use at their discretion** with any of their writings except the research project. The grace period allows you to turn in the paper *any time before the next class meeting*. **If you wish to invoke your grace period, please cut on the dotted line and attach the appropriate quarter-sheet to your essay (see below).**

**Please remember: It is your responsibility to keep up with assigned readings and paper due dates as presented in the syllabus. Check with me or a classmate to keep up with syllabus changes. Many resources (i.e. lecture slides, handouts, etc...) will be available on the class Blackboard page as well.**

#### Writing Papers:

**MLA format-** All out of class assignments must be typed and double-spaced with realistic margins according to MLA format. I will outline this format in class prior to your first written assignment. Any up-to-date English/writing reference will have a section on how to use this set of writing conventions. If you have questions about the style, please see me. These are two of the best online resources to use if you need information about MLA:

*The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL):* <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>  
*Bedford/ St. Martin's Writing and Research:* <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/>

**Returned Papers-** Generally, all graded copies of papers will be returned one class after the due date. I am more concerned about content than grammatical troubles, but papers that are not carefully proofed will receive point deductions accordingly.

**Computers-** It is *strongly recommended* that you use a computer in the writing process (either your personal machine or one in a campus computer lab), as it will greatly reduce the time you spend on revision. Try to get into the habit of using a word processing program when you initially compose your work and save to a separate diskette frequently. It will make revisions more convenient, and it will also give you experience using the technology. All papers should be proofed thoroughly *by a human!* Computer spell-checks and grammar checks are notoriously fallible! You can also send papers to

me prior to turning them in for a grade; I will do my best to provide you with constructive comments for improvement. You can also submit your work to the TRCC Writing Center for review: [TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu](mailto:TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu)

**Campus Policies:**

*Plagiarism-* Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person’s words or ideas in your writing. **Conscious plagiarism is an unacceptable academic behavior that will result in a “0” for the plagiarized assignment, with no re-write possibilities. Any repeat offense will result in a failing grade in the course.** Plagiarism by omission or “unconscious” plagiarism will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

*Withdrawal policy-* A student who finds it necessary to discontinue a course once class has met must provide written notice to the registrar. Withdrawal forms are available at the Registrar’s office on the Thames and Mohegan sites. No punitive “W” grades are assigned to any withdrawal requested before the unrestricted withdrawal deadline for the semester. Withdrawal requests received after this deadline must bear the signature of the instructor. No withdrawals are permitted after the last class preceding the final exam. Any student who does not obtain an official withdrawal, but simply stops attending classes, runs the risk of receiving an “F” grade for the course

*Students with disabilities-* If you have a hidden or visible disability that may require special accommodations, please see me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, please be sure to register with Chris Scarborough in order to find out what services are available for you.

**Revisions to Syllabus:**

The information contained in the syllabus is subject to revision at my discretion. I will inform the class of any changes that are made. If you miss a class, contact me or talk to a classmate upon your return to verify that you have the most up-to-date information.

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**Grace Period Slip**

(Please attach this piece of paper when you turn in your assignment.)

This sheet entitles me to one grace period of one class session. I am not using this for my final research paper and I realize that once this period is used for the semester, I *do not* get another one!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Today’s Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment Description and due date:

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## Reading and Assignment Schedule for Philosophy 151- fall 2012

### **Week 1**

Wednesday 8/29

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

None

#### In Class

Introduction to the course, active reading strategies, writing responses, syllabus quiz, themes, course ground rules, what is religion?, Paden reading

### **Week 2**

Wednesday 9/5

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

LR-Chapter 1- The Religious Response, ANTH- Bailey, Freud, Marx, Tillich, Campbell

#### In Class

Ways of studying religion, materialistic, functional and faith perspectives, ultimate reality, exploring the "big questions", research assignment detailed

### **Week 3**

Wednesday 9/12

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 2- Indigenous Sacred Ways, ANTH- The Essence of Cosmic Man, Toelken reading; SR- creation myths reading packet from Eliade

**Reader Response #1 due by end of class**

#### In Class

Animism, Native American traditions, modern borrowings by other movements

### **Week 4**

Wednesday 9/19

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

LR-Chapter 8- Judaism, ANTH- both Genesis accounts, Abraham's covenant, Eye for an Eye, Frankl, Lerner- "Ten Commitments"

#### In Class

Moral codes and behavioral codes, Biblical conflicts, literal vs. metaphorical interpretations, video, foundations of Christianity, modern Judaism

### **Week 5**

Wednesday 9/26

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 9- Christianity, SR- Pontifical Proclamation on NT study, ANTH- Beatitudes, Good Samaritan, Mother Teresa, The Rise of the Mega-church

#### In Class

History of church, perspectives on Christianity, differing view on the virtuous life, proselytizing, impact on western civilization, Christ imagery, NT interpretation

### **Week 6**

Wednesday 10/3

#### Readings/ Assignments Due

LR-Chapter 10- Islam, ANTH- "People of the Book", "Righteousness" and "Jihad", God in a World of Muslims and Christians; SR- Sam Harris and Jack Shaheen

**Reader response #2 due by the end of class**

In Class

“Pillars of Islam”, women’s roles, tradition vs. teaching, Sheehan article discussion, modern Islam, introduction to matrix use

**Week 7**

Wednesday 10/10

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 5- Buddhism, ANTH- Discovering Universal Emptiness, Zen and the Koan

In Class

Asceticism, mysticism, meditation practice, Buddhist tenets, schisms/branches of Buddhism, PP slides; making the midterm

**Week 8**

Wednesday 10/17

Readings/ Assignments Due

Study for midterm

In Class

Take midterm

**Week 9**

Wednesday 10/24

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR-Taoism, SR- Selections from the *Tao Te Ching*

**Reader response #3 due by end of class**

In Class

Symbolism and balance, ascetic ideals, “environmental” religion, Buddhist connections, PP slides

**Week 10**

Wednesday 10/31

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapters 6 and 7-Shinto and Confucianism, SR- Shinto myth/divinity readings

In Class

Analects discussion, “filial piety”, incorporation of multiple traditions in China, animistic religious traditions, Shinto/Buddhist multiplex, review midterm, Shinto ceremony video

**Week 11**

Wednesday 11/7

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 3- Hinduism, ANTH- Realize the Brahman, I am the Beginning and the End, SR- yoga readings

In Class

Variations of “Hinduism”, polytheistic monotheism, Brahman/atman, timeline, sources of teachings, main terminology, more ascetic traditions, yoga

**Week 12**

Wednesday 11/14

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapters 4 and 11- Jainism and Sikhism, ANTH- Respect for Life, The Blind Man and the Elephant, Guru Nanak at Mecca, The Sikh Vision of an Ideal Society

**Reader Response #4 due by end of class**

In Class

Jain, Sikh, and Hindu/Islamic connections, the guru tradition, practice and traditions; guest speaker?

**Week 13**

Wednesday 11/21

No Class- Thanksgiving Break- Get stuffed!

**Week 14**

Wednesday 11/28

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 12- New Religious Movements, ANTH- TM Today, After the Founder's Death, SR- New Movements handout

**Reader Response #5 due by end of class**

In Class

New directions in religious pluralism, scientology, Raelians, Yoda, other faiths, guest speaker?

**Week 15**

Wednesday 12/5

Readings/ Assignments Due

LR- Chapter 13- Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ANTH-Religion, UN Declaration, Interfaith Dialogue

Final copies of research project due by the end of class

In Class

Making final exam, wiki project presentations

**Week 16**

Wednesday 12/12

Readings/ Assignments Due

Study for Final exam

In Class

Final exam

**All research papers and any remaining pieces  
of work are due by 3pm on Friday,  
12/14/2012.**